

## Abstract

This paper argues that imperial projection of Beijing was shaped by the visual politics between the political and commercial centers of the Qing empire, namely the capital and the provincial metropolis of Suzhou. Both the thriving commerce of Suzhou and its full visualization in Xu Yang's visual tribute, *Burgeoning Life in a Resplendent Age*, was so compatible to cityscapes of a capital that Suzhou became an imagined Other to the emperor. Prosperous Suzhou was marginalized as a provincial city in the imperial projection of Beijing, whereas the capital was constructed as a magnificent imperial center surpassing the provinces. The mutual interaction in the production of cityscapes from the two cities demonstrates how a dynamic network of local and imperial exchange altered the visual politics in which the court was transformed from an absolute supremacy to a dominant power that nonetheless had to respond to the economic center of the empire.